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Citation for published version:

Cameron, E 2017, "Offensive to national sentiment"? The bicentenary of the Union of 1707. in T Otte (ed.), The Age of Anniversaries: The Cult of Commemoration, 1895-1925. Routledge Studies in Modern European History, Routledge, Abingdon, pp. 82-100. DOI: 20.500.11820/c8d4db95-4fd7-4b02-a386-c894438fc905

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[20.500.11820/c8d4db95-4fd7-4b02-a386-c894438fc905](https://doi.org/20.500.11820/c8d4db95-4fd7-4b02-a386-c894438fc905)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

The Age of Anniversaries

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‘Offensive to national sentiment’? The bicentenary of the Union of 1707.¹

Ewen A. Cameron

Roland Quinault, in his important article on the cult of anniversaries in the long nineteenth century, emphasised the change that came over such events in the later part of the period. He noted that abandonment of

classical ritual, poetry and melodrama in favour of a more historical approach ... marked by scholarly lectures, historical exhibitions, and ... statues. This ... reflected the contemporary emergence of History as a distinct academic discipline and the growth of learned historical societies and journals.²

This paper will examine the events and publications that marked the bicentenary of the Anglo-Scottish Union of 1707 and will assess the extent to which Quinault’s framework is applicable in the Scottish context. The paper will go beyond this, however, to address another question: that of the validity of the notion that there was a ‘strange death of Scottish history’ and a historical ‘failure of nerve’ in Scotland in the late nineteenth century. This idea was put forward by Marinell Ash to explain the apparent distinction between the active interest in antiquarianism in the early to mid nineteenth century, a period that saw the establishment of a wide range of clubs

¹ My first engagement with the material that forms the basis of this paper came during the early part of my career in the University of Edinburgh. With colleagues in the then Scottish History Department at 17 Buccleuch Place I taught on a course imaginatively entitled ‘Scottish History 3’. One of the strands in the course was the development of Scottish historiography. I would like to record my thanks to the late John W.M. Bannerman, the late John M. Simpson, William Ferguson, Michael Lynch and Alex Murdoch – a group who held a variety of opinions on the past and future of the Anglo-Scottish Union – for their collegiality, advice and kindness not least during the regular 11am coffee break, a tradition that became a casualty of changes in university life. They bear no responsibility for what follows.

²Roland Quinault, ‘The Cult of the Centenary c.1784–1914’, *Historical Research*, 71 (1998), 321.

devoted to the publication of historical sources, and the seeming decline of such activities in the late nineteenth century.³ This thesis can be questioned in a variety of ways but the bi-centenary of the Union provides a particular concentration of activities that suggests that public debate about matters of Scottish history was very much part of the culture of Edwardian Scotland.

The paper will analyse the way in which the anniversary was marked. Attention will be paid to the political, scholarly and religious culture of late Victorian and Edwardian Scotland. The generation before the Great War has been seen as the high water mark of a 'unionist' age. In this view, Scotland, unlike Ireland, seemed not to embrace an overt nationalism. There seemed to be a consensus around the essential solidity of the Union. There was no political organisation that campaigned for the repeal of the Union and the campaign for Scottish home rule was relatively new, with the formation of an Association devoted to this cause having been formed as recently as 1886.⁴ It would be after the Great War before the groups that eventually coalesced as the Scottish National Party in 1934 began to be founded.⁵ It was another forty years until the SNP, as the sole vehicle for anti-unionist politics in Scotland, emerged from the electoral shadows to win parliamentary representation.

The period from 1886 to 1912 is at least as important for the development of Scottish unionism as it is for the early foundations of Scottish nationalism.⁶ A significant portion of the Scottish Liberal Party – and from all wings of the party – opposed

³ Marinell Ash, *The Strange Death of Scottish History* (Edinburgh, 1980), 124–52; Colin Kidd, 'The Strange Death of Scottish History revisited: constructions of the past in Scotland, c. 1790–1914', *Scottish Historical Review*, 76 (1997), 86–102.

⁴ Graeme Morton, 'The first home rule movement in Scotland', in H.T. Dickinson and M. Lynch (eds), *The Challenge to Westminster: Sovereignty, Devolution and Independence* (East Linton, 2000),

⁵ Richard Finlay, *Independent and Free: Scottish Politics and the Origin of the Scottish National Party* (Edinburgh, 1994); James Mitchell and Gerry Hassan (eds), *Scottish National Party Leaders* (London, 2016).

⁶ Catriona Burness, 'Strange Associations': *The Irish Question and the Making of Scottish Unionism* (East Linton, 2003).

Gladstone's plans for Irish home rule and the Liberal Unionists did well in the general elections in the period from 1886 to 1900.⁷ The current condition of Scottish politics is also relevant here. In September 2014 a referendum on the future of the Union was held and the Scottish electorate voted by 55 per cent to 45 percent against the proposition that Scotland should become an independent state. This event, raised the profile of an apparent polarity between unionism (No) and nationalism (Yes) that is misleading. Post-referendum politics have shown that the issues cannot be so easily reduced to this formula. It is equally dangerous to project this polarisation between absolute positions back to the period around 1907. Many who might be seen as unionist, or who declared as such, held views that contained much that might be defined as nationalist. We should be careful of assuming a whiggish interpretation of the Union – from unionism in the nineteenth century, through administrative devolution from 1885 to 1999, to parliamentary devolution from 1999 down to the referendum on Scottish independence in 2014 and, indeed, on to the results of the referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union in 2016. Although there would appear to be a clear narrative from a broadly unionist political culture to a broadly nationalist one, the trajectory is more unsteady than first appears. There was a long period from the mid-1920s to the mid 1960s where the unionist parties –Labour and the Scottish Unionist Party (as the Conservatives were known in Scotland from 1912 to 1965) – dominated. The Labour government's devolution plans in the 1970s were not implemented and the pro-devolution consensus which is often held to be the product of the Thatcherite period,

⁷ Nathan P. Kane, 'A study of the debate on Scottish home rule, 1886 to 1914', PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2015, 22–66.

took some time to become evident.⁸ Throughout these shifts the union of 1707 was a vital element in the structure that kept the idea of Scotland alive in the late nineteenth century. The popular understanding of the union in this period was its 'guarantee' of the continuing distinctiveness of the Scottish education system, including the universities, the Church of Scotland and the Scottish legal system, provided the basis for an enduring Scottish national infrastructure. This, in turn, ensured that Scottish national feeling was based on a solid institutional basis. Indeed, the term 'unionist-nationalism' has been coined to give effect to this notion. Morton, the author of this apparent oxymoron, has argued that the supposedly missing Scottish nationalism of the nineteenth century can be found in the civil society that was sustained by the union. He developed this point by arguing that the nationalism of this period should not be judged by the absence of a demand for a separate Scottish state, something which would have been anachronistic in a period when the idea was to aspire to a minimal state. There is, then, more to 'unionist nationalism' than the suggestions that there were simultaneous Scottish and British identities present in Scotland in the nineteenth century, a self-evident and uncontroversial point.⁹ Although unionist-nationalism is the construct of a historian and none of the participants discussed here would have used the label, it does help us to grasp the elision of 'unionist' and 'nationalist' understandings of Scottish life. The events of 1907 then cannot be reduced to rival camps of those promoting celebration and other inviting condemnation of events two hundred years earlier.

⁸ Ewen A. Cameron, 'Unionism and nationalism: the historical context of Scottish politics', in Duncan McTavish (ed.), *Politics in Scotland* (Abingdon, 2016), 6–23; Ewen A. Cameron, 'The political histories of modern Scotland', *Scottish Affairs*, no 85, Autumn 2013, 1–28

⁹ Graeme Morton, *Unionist Nationalism: Governing Urban Scotland, 1830 – 1860* (East Linton, 1999); Graeme Morton, 'What if? The significance of Scotland's missing nationalism in the nineteenth century', Dauvit Broun, R.J. Finlay and Michael Lynch (eds), *Image and Identity: The Making and Re-making of Scotland through the Ages* (Edinburgh, 1998), 157–76.

Another term that has been introduced is 'banal unionism'.¹⁰ This has been used to suggest that for much of the period since 1707 that the Union has been so central to Scottish life that it is almost taken for granted and permeates most aspects of Scottish politics and society. This implies that, alongside active political unionism, evident at times of constitutional crisis – such as 1886 or 1912 – there is also a more passive, implicit form of the doctrine which extends beyond those contested moments. This is also very helpful in understanding the bicentenary in that most of the events that took place were based on an assumption of both that positive and the enduring nature of the Union.

The remainder of the chapter will be divided into three sections. The first will look at scholarly engagement with the bicentenary, the second will examine public events and the final section will return to political and religious themes.

Scholarship

Although there were some public events associated with the bicentenary of the Union, and they will be explored below, the principal means of marking the anniversary of the Union was in print. The leading newspaper in the west of Scotland, the *Glasgow Herald*, published a series of articles in late 1906 and 1907 and most of them were published in a book in 1907.¹¹ In his introduction, Peter Hume Brown (the first holder of the Sir William Fraser Chair of Scottish History and Palaeography at the University of Edinburgh) suggested that the book contained

¹⁰ Colin Kidd, *Union and Unionisms: Political Thought in Scotland, 1500–2000* (Cambridge, 2008), 23–31; Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London, 1995).

¹¹ *The Union of 1707: A survey of Events by Various Writers with an Introduction by Peter Hume Brown and the Text of the Articles of Union* (Glasgow, 1907) [hereafter *The Union of 1707*].

‘divergent’ opinions and ‘various’ standpoints but that there was convergence on the conclusion that the Union was ‘inevitable, and, at the same time, desirable’. Later in his piece he argued that it was ‘necessary and desirable’ and he presented a narrative that would become quite familiar to readers of editorials in Scottish local and national newspapers over the first half of 1707: Scotland was not capable of maintaining the status of an independent kingdom and that continuing independence in a dangerous world would have led to ‘a thousand risks of being crushed in a contest waged with blood and iron’. He felt that the Union restored the connection between Scotland the mainstream of European diplomacy and culture that was lost in the internecine struggles of the seventeenth century and the anonymity of the Union of the Crowns.¹² Hume Brown was an interesting character who had a wide range of interests in European history and thought and was rather more sophisticated than many of the legalistic record scholars who dominated the early phase of the development of the academic historical profession in the Scottish universities. He was a close friend of Richard Burdon Haldane, with whom he shared a learned Germanophilia and he was a proponent of the importance of literature for understanding historical context.¹³ Although he argued in many of his works that the Union was important for the development of Scotland, he did not equate this view with the end of Scottish identity. Indeed, he argued throughout his oeuvre that it was the ability of Scotland to participate in the Union as an equal, or near-equal partner, with England that ensured both the success of the Union and the continued

¹² *The Union of 1707*, 1, 7–9; see also Peter Hume Brown, ‘The union of the parliaments of England and Scotland, 1707’, *Scottish Historical Review*, 4 (1907), 121–34.

¹³ Dauvit Broun, ‘A forgotten anniversary. Peter Hume Brown’s History of Scotland, 1911’, in Neil Evans and Huw Price, *Writing a Small Nation’s Past: Wales in Comparative Perspective, 1850–1950* (Abingdon, 2013), 267–84, this is a wider-ranging essay than its title suggests and it contains much about Hume Brown’s intellectual background and influences; see also John Robertson, ‘Brown, Peter Hume (1849–1918)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, 2004) [<http://oxforddnb.com/view/article/32115>]; C.H. Frith, ‘In memoriam: Peter Hume Brown’, *Scottish Historical Review*, 16 (1918–19), 153–61.

economic, political and cultural development of Scotland. His principal work was a three volume history of Scotland that was completed in 1911 and represented a mature and professional attempt to relate the history of Scotland to wider European developments over a long period.¹⁴ Although his career as an academic historian at the University of Edinburgh fits with the classic period of the professionalization of the discipline in the Scottish universities, it should be noted that the Fraser Chair of Scottish History arose from a slightly different route from the Chair of History held successively by G.W. Prothero and Sir Richard Lodge. The Scottish History chair arose from the legacy of the lawyer and antiquarian Sir William Fraser, most of whose extensive wealth was gained from his extensive commissions to produce volumes of documents from the muniment rooms of the leading Scottish aristocratic families and his work on peerage cases.¹⁵

The Fraser Chair in Edinburgh was joined in 1911 by a Chair in Scottish History and Literature at the University of Glasgow, which had also seen an appointment to a Chair of History in the 1890s. Again, the roots of the Scottish chair were rather separate, the funding coming from a public exhibition of Scottish History, Art and Industry' in Kelvingrove park close to the University in the west end of the city.¹⁶ The first holder of the chair was Robert Sangster Rait, best known as the historian of the Scottish Parliament, the subject of his article in the *Glasgow Herald* volume. Rait boiled down the general thesis of his longer works to argue that the pre-1707 Scottish parliament was hardly a loss to Scottish life. He presented it as a corrupt

¹⁴ Peter Hume Brown, *A History of Scotland*, 3 vols (Cambridge, 1898–1909).

¹⁵ For contrasting views of Fraser see accounts by two later holders of the Chair named after him, Gordon Donaldson, *Sir William Fraser: The Man and His Work* (Edinburgh, 1985); G. W. S. Barrow, 'Fraser, Sir William (1816 – 1898)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, 2004. [<http://oxforddnb.com/view/article/10131>], Professor Barrow noted that Fraser was an 'inveterate snob, he dearly loved a lord and liked nothing better than hobnobbing with the landed classes'.

¹⁶ Edward J. Cowan, 'Patriotism, public opinion and the 'People's chair of Scottish History and Literature', *Scottish Historical Review*, 93 (2015), 177–94.

and under-developed institution that was, through the operation of the 'Lords of the Articles' (which controlled the agenda of its business), firmly in the control of the monarch and the nobility. The latter sat in its single chamber alongside the clergy and the burgh and shire commissioners. Rait argued that the Lords of the Articles were 'fatal to its constitutional progress' and that even at the great moments of crisis in Scottish history, such as the Reformation and the Covenants, 'it cannot be said that the Parliament led the country'.¹⁷ In these views Rait had more in common with the historians and antiquarians of the earlier nineteenth century who were highly negative about Scotland's constitutional traditions.¹⁸ His constitutional thought was emphatic about the superiority of the English Parliament and the greater development of that institution as a sovereign assembly. Indeed, later in life Rait co-authored a volume with Albert Venn Dicey and edited the latter's *Memorials*.¹⁹ Dicey contributed to the anniversary with a public lecture at the Working Men's College at Camden Town. In his remarks he laid less emphasis on his thesis of parliamentary sovereignty than on the idea that the Union provided a form of virtual home rule for Scotland. He shared Rait's view that the end of the Scottish parliament was scarcely a loss to Scottish life and politics.²⁰

A further contribution to the volume from a leading figure from the historical profession was the article on 'The English standpoint' by Richard Lodge, Professor of History at the University of Edinburgh. Lodge recognised that the demand for a

¹⁷ *The Union of 1707*, 10–22.

¹⁸ for Rait's biography see D.M. Abbott, 'Rait, Robert Sangster (1874–1936)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, 2004. [<http://oxforddnb.com/view/article/35655>]; for his longer work on the Parliament see *The Scottish Parliament before the Union of the Crowns* (London, 1901); *The Parliaments of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1924); Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689–c. 1830* (Cambridge, 1993).

¹⁹ Albert Venn Dicey and Robert S. Rait, *Thoughts on the Union Between England and Scotland* (London, 1920); Robert S. Rait (ed.), *Memorials of Albert Venn Dicey: Being Chiefly Letters and Diaries* (London, 1925).

²⁰ *Glasgow Herald*, 15 Mar. 1907, 10.

federal union would have been more popular in 1707 and that this was one of a range of missed opportunities. He also made the important point that contemporary observers of the Union would have been unlikely to have predicted its bicentenary and he admitted that there were in Edwardian Scotland growing feelings that Scotland was neglected within the Union. He suggested that the Anglo-Scottish union was a much happier arrangement than the Anglo-Irish Union because there was a closer geographical and racial relationship between Scotland and Ireland than there was between Ireland and Britain and that the Union of 1707 ensured that 'Scotland will not cease to be Scotland because England would like it to be'.²¹ Other important articles in the volume included J.H. Millar on the 'Literary revival in Scotland after the Union'; William Law Mathieson on 'The Church and the Union'; W.R. Scott on economic themes and a second article by Matheson comparing the unions of 1707 and 1800.²² These papers emphasised the importance of the Union to later Scottish development in economic and cultural fields. There was what appears to a modern reader as an uncritical acceptance of the importance of the Union to the progress of Scotland in the post-1707 period. In its range of topics, however, as well as the fact that, while this work was not supported by academic apparatus, the authors were all important scholars in their own fields who were drawing on extensive published research distilled for a general readership.²³

The book as a whole provides evidence in support of Quinault's thesis in that this aspect of the anniversary was driven by the increasingly professionalised nature of approaches to history in Scotland. This, it could be argued, was in itself a product of

²¹ *The Union of 1707*, 160–74

²² *The Union of 1707*, 55–62; 92–109, 134–59, 175–81.

²³ Peter Hume Brown, 'The teaching of Scottish history in Schools', *Scottish Historical Review*, 5 (1907), 41–51.

the Union of 1707. One important element of the legislation and Treaty of 1707 was the guarantee of the survival of the Scottish universities. The ancient Scottish universities retained their distinctiveness in matter of governance and curriculum in the post-union period. Throughout the nineteenth century there had been periodic attempts to reform the universities with the most important act coming in 1889. This modernised the curricula, increased the potential for specialisation and advanced study (including in history) increased the numbers of non-professorial staff and improved their employment conditions and imported from Germany the expectation that universities were places where research would be carried out across a range of fields, including the history of Scotland. While Prothero, Lodge and others gave the study of history in Edinburgh and Glasgow a strong emphasis on English and European constitutional topics, there was also the development of Scottish history – as we have seen – with the appointments of Hume Brown, Rait and their successors to Chairs of Scottish History.²⁴ There was also an infrastructure of publication which supported the activities of this cohort of professional historians. The quarterly *Scottish Historical Review* began publication in 1904, for example, and contained many works by Hume Brown and his colleagues. Although the publishing clubs – Bannatyne, Maitland, Spalding and others – declined in activity in the late nineteenth century the work of publishing primary material was taken up by the Scottish History Society, which was founded in 1886.²⁵ Register House in Edinburgh made

²⁴ R.D. Anderson, *Education and Opportunity in Victorian Scotland: Schools and Universities* (Oxford, 1983), 253–93; R. D. Anderson, 'The development of history teaching in the Scottish universities, 1894–939', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 32 (2012), 50–73; R.D. Anderson, 'University history teaching, national identity and unionism in Scotland, 1862–1914', *Scottish Historical Review*, 91 (2012), 1–41; R.D. Anderson, 'University history teaching and the Humboldtian model in Scotland, 1858–1914', *History of Universities*, 25 (2010), 138–184.

²⁵ Ash, *Strange Death*, 59–86; D.J. Withrington, 'Aberdeen antiquaries: the founding of the Spalding Club, 1839', *Aberdeen University Review*, 44 (1971), 42–55; Gordon Donaldson, 'A lang pedigree: an essay to mark the centenary of the Scottish History Society', *Scottish Historical Review*, 65 (1986), 1–16.

significant strides as a national archive of Scotland and there was much crossover between the 'archivists' who worked there and the University historians in Scottish history. Beyond the clubs and the Scottish History Society there was also a vast effort to bring the records of medieval Scotland, both those related to the institutions of the pre-Union state and the chronicle tradition, to publication. Even if some of this work has been superseded by modern scholarship it does not provide evidence for the Ash thesis of a 'failure of nerve'.²⁶ Many of the academic historians of this period, perhaps especially Hume Brown, were adept at communicating with the public and were closely connected through publication and the provision of academic advice, with the school-teaching profession. The effects of this work was clearly in evidence in the way in which the two hundredth anniversary of the Union was celebrated in print. It does not necessarily contradict Quinault's thesis to go on to argue that the way in which the anniversary of the Union was marked was characterised by, but not confined to, the effect of the work of professional academic historians. There were some public events, which will be discussed below, but the most prominent way in which the Scottish public would have noticed the anniversary was through the columns of the daily and weekly newspaper press, it is this source that will be drawn on in the next two sections of the paper.

Public Events

Although the bicentenary has not attracted much attention, there is an assumed consensus that there was very little commemoration of the Union in 1907. Referring

²⁶ Richard A. Marsden, *Cosmo Innes and the Defence of Scotland's Past, c. 1825 – 1875* (Farnham, 2014), esp. 55–90; Matthew H. Hammond, 'Ethnicity and the writing of medieval Scottish history', *Scottish Historical Review*, 85 (2006), 1–27; Margaret D. Young, 'The age of the Deputy Clerk Register, 1806 – 1928', *Scottish Historical Review*, 53 (1974), 157–93.

to an event in Greenock – a Clydeside shipbuilding town – in 1907 one leading historian has described this as ‘one of the few events to mark the bi-centenary’.²⁷ On the other side of Scotland flags also came out in May to mark the anniversary, this time on the public buildings of the small Fife port of Kinghorn. On the evidence of press reports, however, this would seem to have been a rare event.²⁸ More significant was the demonstration in Greenock noticed by Whatley. At this event both the Union flag and the Saltire were flown, speakers emphasised the enduring nature and importance of the Union but a choir sang some Scots songs such as Scots Wha Hae and Auld Lang Syne. Scotland’s imperial contribution was celebrated but low level grievances to the name of Scotland – such as the use of ‘England’ to refer to Britain or the United Kingdom – were deprecated. The event was organised by the ‘Scottish Rights Association’, a hangover from the National Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights, established in 1853 and which burned bright for a few years before retreating from visibility. It had worked to overcome such slights to Scotland as were referenced in Greenock in 1907 as well as more serious political issues, such as the necessity for greater consideration of Scottish issues at Westminster, a minister with responsibility for Scottish affairs in the Cabinet, or greater alignment between, as they saw it, Scotland’s fiscal contribution and government expenditure north of the border. Some of its activists survived to be active in the Scottish Home Rule Association from 1886. They were not opposed to the Union and did not seek to overturn it, merely to make its operation rather more sensitive to Scotland.²⁹ In Greenock in 1907 they celebrated the unveiling of a

²⁷ Christopher Whatley, *The Scots and the Union* (Edinburgh, 2006), 18.

²⁸ *Scotsman*, 17 May 1907, 6.

²⁹ For two slightly different views of this strand of Scottish ‘nationalist’ thinking see H.J. Hanham, ‘Mid-century Scottish nationalism: romantic and radical’, in Robert Robson (ed.), *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain* (London, 1967), 143–79 and Graeme Morton, ‘Scottish rights and centralisation in the mid-nineteenth century’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2 (1996), 257–79.

‘handsome iron stanchion surrounded by flags and emblems of the two countries’, one of the few contributions to Scottish material culture generated by the bicentenary of the Union. The editor of the *Greenock Telegraph*, John Arnot, was the main speaker and his speech touched on a series of important themes that would crop up across the different contexts in which the bicentenary of the Union was marked. He admitted that if he had been a participant in the Union debates in 1706 – 7 he would have preferred a federal union to the incorporating measure that was passed but he stated that neither he nor the Scottish Rights Association were opposed to the continuation of the Union. Indeed, it was his view that ‘there could now be no thought, not even a passing dream about the abrogation of the union. He went on to argue that Scotland would not rebel against the Union in the way that Ireland had because ‘for weal or woe, Scotland must remain an integral part of the vast and world-spreading British scheme, set like a beautiful Cairngorm stone in the mosaic of Empire.’³⁰ This idea of Scotland as a key player in the Empire was a ubiquitous reference point in the late Victorian and Edwardian period. This was celebrated as a version of Scotland’s ‘manifest destiny’ by both unionists and nationalists until a more critical historical perspective was developed in the late twentieth century.³¹ The Scottish contribution to Empire was a useful device to Scottish patriots, such as Arnot, who wished to celebrate the Union but retain a fealty to a particular idea of Scotland as an instrumental part of the United Kingdom and something more than a small nation in north west Europe.

³⁰ *Glasgow Herald*, 6 May 1907, 5.

³¹ The historiographical journey can be charted from Andrew Dewar Gibb, *Scottish Empire* (London, 1937) to John M. MacKenzie, ‘Empire and national identities: the case of Scotland’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 8 (1998), 215–31; Gibb was a former Unionist parliamentary candidate who was one of the founding members of the SNP.

A third event, that touches on some of these themes, and was planned but never took place was a full-scale celebration of the bicentenary organised by the Convention of Royal Burghs. The Convention was a body that met to defend the interests of the main centres of trade in medieval and early modern Scotland. It was seen by some as an alternative source of legislation and legitimate political authority in some areas to the Scottish Parliament. By the late nineteenth century, however, it was less prestigious and important but had 173 members and no less self-regard than in its heyday.³² At a meeting in late January 1907 one of its leading members, D W Kemp of Dornoch (a small burgh in Sutherland in the north of Scotland) raised the idea of the Convention organising an event to celebrate the bicentenary. Kemp noted that the Convention took no note of the centenary of the Union in 1807 and was disappointed that there were no plans for a major Scottish event to mark the bicentenary. He proposed a series of festivities in Edinburgh that would involve a dinner to be addressed by a prominent, but unidentified, Scotsman with the Lord Mayor of London as the principal guest. This would be followed by a procession of the Convention, in full regalia, from Parliament Square, the site of the last sitting of the pre-Union Scottish parliament, up the Lawnmarket to the Castle where the Scottish regalia, packed away at the moment of Union and only rediscovered by the antiquarian researches of Sir Walter Scott in 1818, would be inspected and publicly recognised as the pre-eminent symbols of Scottish nationality which ought to remain in Scotland in perpetuity. Kemp's intention was 'neither to glorify nor to depreciate the Union but that in doing something they should emphasise their continued Scottish nationality'. James Glen of Greenock thought that the Union ' had done

³² For a series of articles in 1907 on the Convention's history and contemporary role see *Glasgow Herald*, 19 Jun. 9; 26 Jun. 8; 17 Jul., 7; 24 Jul, 7.

something towards securing and maintaining the peace and the liberties of Europe and of the world' and that it was an event which had been brought about by 'the providence of God. Another member, who remained nameless in the press reports, was less sonorous and expressed concern that it would rain on the Convention's parade up the Royal Mile and that its dignity would not survive a soaking. Mr Simpson, town clerk of the Royal Burgh of Dunfermline struck a different note again when he moved that no action be taken. He said that it seemed a 'queer argument in favour of the proposed demonstration that it was designed to show they were as Scotch as ever'. His view that there 'were differences of opinion as to whether the Union was a desirable thing or not' elicited shouts of 'No, no'!³³ Although the Convention agreed to try to bring off the event it would seem that nothing happened. The Lord Mayor of London was not available and the Colonial Prime Ministers were otherwise engaged with a shipping conference.³⁴ There was some hope that a visit to Glasgow of the Prince of Wales could coincide with the planned events but that could not be organised properly either and the event foundered on the rocks of, according to one newspaper, 'public indifference'.³⁵ Around the discussion of this stillborn event the point was made that the plans to mark the anniversary seemed to lack a proper Anglo-Scottish dimension:

Unless the ardour of the persistent suitor has been chilled by two hundred years of prosperous matrimony it is natural to expect that England should take the lead in arranging a commemoration ritual.³⁶

³³ *Glasgow Herald*, 31 Jan. 1907, 3; see also *Glasgow Herald*, 21 Feb. 1907, 6; *Aberdeen Journal*, 31 Jan. 1907, 7; *Dundee Courier*, 31 Jan. 1907, 4.

³⁴ *Glasgow Herald*, 28 Feb. 1907, 6.

³⁵ *Glasgow Herald*, 2 Mar. 1907, 8; 14 Mar. 1907, 7.

³⁶ *Glasgow Herald*, 2 Mar. 1907, 8.

There was little sign of any enthusiasm for a celebration from England, although a Manchester newspaper did touch on an important theme:

A British celebration of the Union, which is an object lesson to the world of the mutual advantage of common action for a common end, and which above all else combined the two nations to fight the commercial battle which resulted in the complete change of the United Kingdom from an agricultural to a manufacturing country, would be in itself a fitting memorial.³⁷

These event, or rather the relative lack of them to a degree bear out one of the key points of Quinault's thesis about the changing attitude to anniversaries in the early twentieth century, there was certainly little public ritual to mark the events. The Union could not be fitted into a romantic interpretation of Scottish history unlike some other key moments. There was none of the pathos associated with the memory of the Jacobite movement. This generated a Cairn at Culloden, to which the members of the Gaelic Society of Inverness made (and still make) an annual pilgrimage, a striking monument at Glenfinnan and a host of other smaller markers and events. There was growing recognition of the importance of the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314 and this was fitted, ingeniously, into a broadly unionist framework. Bruce's victory preserved the independence of Scotland and allowed the nation to develop until the point where it could enter into, benefit from and survive the Union with England. There was also a significant cult around the Covenanters, the Presbyterian radicals who fought against religious innovations from England in the seventeenth century, and who were adopted by a range of political groups across the nineteenth

³⁷ *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 5 Feb. 1907, 6.

and twentieth century and increasingly came to be seen as martyrs for their cause.³⁸

By comparison the Union was seen as a rather squalid political deal which may have, in the longer term, brought some benefit to Scotland but could scarcely be celebrated in public as an event.

In the absence of a Scottish parliament in this period other bodies such as the Convention of Royal Burghs were sometimes looked to as a surrogate. Prominent though the Convention was it was eclipsed in this respect by another national forum: the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. After the Union between the Free Church (or most of it) and the United Presbyterian Church in 1900 the annual meeting of the United Free Church was also an important national occasion. Given the importance of the Union to the securing of Protestantism in Scotland these were venues for comment on the anniversary. For Presbyterians the Union itself was probably less important than the Protestant Religion and Presbyterian Church Act, of the Scottish Parliament, of 1706. This was better known as the Act of Security and, importantly, it was inserted into the legislation of both the Scottish and English parliaments that enacted the Treaty that brought the Union into force in May 1707.

³⁸ There is a growing literature that engages with these themes: Graeme Morton, 'The most efficacious patriot: the heritage of William Wallace in nineteenth century Scotland', *Scottish Historical Review*, 77 (1998), 224–51; Graeme Morton, *William Wallace: Man and Myth* (Stroud, 2001); Graeme Morton, *William Wallace: A National Tale* (Edinburgh, 2014); Marinell Ash, 'William Wallace and Robert the Bruce', in Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson (eds), *The Myths We Live By* (London, 1990), 83–94; Richard J. Finlay, 'Controlling the Past: Scottish Historiography and Scottish Identity in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *Scottish Affairs*, 9 (Autumn 1994), 127–42. Richard J. Finlay, 'The Wallace cult in the twentieth century' in Edward J. Cowan (ed.), *The Wallace Book* (Edinburgh, 2007), 176–92; James Coleman, *Remembering the Past in Nineteenth-Century Scotland: Commemoration, Nationality and Memory* (Edinburgh, 2014); Murray Pittock, *The Invention of Scotland: The Stuart Myth and the Scottish Identity, 1638 to the Present* (London, 1991); Terry Brotherstone (ed.), *Covenant, Charter and Party: Traditions of Revolt in Modern Scottish History* (Aberdeen, 1989); Edward J. Cowan and Richard J. Finlay (eds), *Scottish History: The Power of the Past* (Edinburgh, 2002); Neil Cameron, 'A romantic folly to romantic folly: the Glenfinnan monument reassessed', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 129 (1999), 887–907.

The key phrase attempted to entrench the position of the Church of Scotland into the 'constitution' of the new United Kingdom:

[the monarch] with the advice and consent of the said Estates of Parliament,
Doth hereby Establish and confirm the true Protestant Religion and Worship,
Discipline and Government of the Church to continue without any alteration to
the people of this land in all succeeding generations ...³⁹

In the general assemblies of 1907 these matters were referred to. The Moderator of the United Free Church referred to the way in which the Act of Security left Presbyterians 'content'. The history is a little more complex than this, however, and this was hinted at in 1907. Despite the Act of Security there were significant and, from a Scottish point of view, unwanted modifications to the religious settlement. In 1712 Westminster passed legislation granting toleration to Episcopalians in Scotland and, even worse, further legislation of the same year reintroduced patronage into the Church of Scotland. This was the right of such as landowners, town councils or the Crown to appoint Church of Scotland ministers. This grievance led to significant divisions in the Church of Scotland, culminating in the Disruption of 1843 and the creation of the Free Church of Scotland, which was based on unwillingness to contemplate the intrusion of the Scottish civil courts in the affairs of the Church. Although Charles McCrie, the United Free Church moderator, referred to the abolition of Patronage in 1874 and celebrated the 'Spiritual Independence' of his

³⁹ Quoted by Francis Lyall, *Of Presbyters and Kings: Church and State in the Law of Scotland* (Aberdeen, 1980), 21; see also, Lord Rodger of Earlsferry, *The Courts, the Church and the Constitution: Aspects of the Disruption of 1843* (Edinburgh, 2008), 5.

Church, the Union granted a more complicated legacy than he was prepared to contemplate.⁴⁰

Political Debate

If the bicentenary did not generate much public activity beyond the flags of Kinghorn, the festivities in George Square, Greenock and an inconclusive debate in the Convention of Royal Burghs in Edinburgh, could it be said that it stimulated public debate about the effect of the Union on Scotland? Although the general tone of the commentary in the press was celebratory rather than subversive a range of different opinions, sometimes varying only by subtle degree, can be detected. The laudatory tone generally expressed the view that the Union had saved Scotland from a position of poverty and vicious religious sectarianism and created the conditions for ‘a harvest of peace, progress and prosperity’ and asserted that the Union was ‘Scotland’s best stroke of fortune; England’s happiest alliance’.⁴¹ A correspondent to an Aberdeen newspaper exemplified this theme. ‘G’ argued that too much attention was paid to Scotland’s ‘Auld Alliance’ with France and not enough to the more important relationship with England:

As everyone knows, Scotland owes her material prosperity to the Union of 1707. But more important still, the Union brought about a better understanding between the two great peoples. ... Though it took many years for international

⁴⁰ *Scotsman*, 22 May 1907, 13; Jeffrey Stephen, ‘The Kirk and the Union, 1706–7’, *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 31 (2001), 68–96; Alasdair Raffe, *The Culture of Controversy: Religious Arguments in Scotland, 1660–1714* (Woodbridge, 2012).

⁴¹ *Scotsman*, 16 Jan. 1907. 8.

antipathies to die down, Queen Anne's desire has today been fully realised.

An unwilling union has at length become a union of hearts.⁴²

The concluding point in this quotation was also a common theme, there was a recognition that the Treaty itself was concluded in messy circumstances, that it was unpopular with a wide section of the Scottish population and that the benefits that were promised at the time of its promotion took time to come to fruition. A newspaper in Inverness in the north of Scotland was blunt about this point, noting that the Union was unpopular at the time of its passing: 'the great majority of Scotsmen regarded the measure as a base surrender of national independence, a disgraceful end to the glorious story of Scotland's past'. Nevertheless, the editorial went on to refer to the main benefits of the Union: the securing of Protestantism, economic prosperity and stability and participation in imperial destiny.⁴³ Nevertheless, there was agreement that the development of Scotland in the later eighteenth century could be put down to the benefits of the Union. The historian William Law Mathieson, writing in the *Scotsman*, articulated this argument in a particularly clear way. He began his article by arguing that the 'independence' of Scotland prior to the Union was illusory, internal poverty and political corruption allied with external diplomatic weakness meant that there was little option but to seek and accept Union with England. Nevertheless, he noted,

As the Union was offensive to national sentiment, and entailed an increase of taxation for the sake of benefits which Could not be immediately realised, it was extremely unpopular ... It was not until after the middle of the century that

⁴² *Aberdeen Journal*, 18 Apr. 1907, 5.

⁴³ *Inverness Courier*, 16 Jan. 1907, 4; at the other end of the country the editorial view was remarkably similar, see *Dumfries and Galloway Courier and Herald*, 16 Jan. 1907, 4.

the industrial revival became general, but long before that there were sufficient signs of progress to herald the dawn.⁴⁴

The *Scotsman*, in a lengthy editorial on the subject, attempted to be even handed about the advantages and disadvantages of the Union, the former being access to imperial markets and the latter being the relatively marginal place of Scotland in the institutions of the new United Kingdom, but returned to this idea of the immediate reception of the Union in 1707:

The Union at the time was intensely unpopular. If it had been possible to put it to a popular vote, in town and country, it would have been rejected by an overwhelming majority ... the forty years that followed the Union afforded not a little confirmation of these evil auguries. The country, if it advanced in trade and social conditions, did not advance as it might and ought to have done ... Discontent and poverty still lingered; loyalty to the Crown and Constitution was still of slow and doubtful growth in many parts.⁴⁵

The last point above was a reference to the continuing appeal of Jacobitism in the highlands and the north east of Scotland. The Jacobite activity of 1708, 1715 and 1719 drew on the unpopularity of the Union and the Hanoverian succession and, with more adroit leadership, could have provided an even more potent threat to the new state that emerged from the Union. It was not only the Episcopalians and Catholics, who provided the bedrock of support for Jacobitism, who were discontented in this period: Presbyterians were riled by the reintroduction of Patronage and Toleration in 1712 and even in Whig burghs such as Glasgow there

⁴⁴ William Law Mathieson, 'The Union: Our "Only Game"', *Scotsman*, 13 Feb. 1907; similar views were expressed by letter-writers such as J.A. Macrae, *Scotsman*, 22 Mar. 1907, 5.

⁴⁵ *Scotsman*, 3 Apr. 1907, 8.

was widespread discontent at the increasing levels and range of taxation – especially the imposition of a Malt tax in 1725, a measure which provoked riots.⁴⁶ There was a general awareness of this in the commentary in 1907 but it was overlain with a deeper appreciation that, in the long term, Scotland had benefited from the Union in economic terms and that this was worthy compensation for the loss of national independence. In this view Scotland benefited from the United Kingdom and its reconciliation with its status in that multi-national state had resulted in a loyalty to its Crown, constitution and empire that could be contrasted with Ireland.⁴⁷ This is not to say that there were not some critics of this consensus. The most obvious were those who could be categorised as ‘nationalists’ and comprised the small group who deprecated the union and all its works and sought its abolition. This was a position on the fringes of Scottish politics in this period, but its voice was heard. One prominent figure in this camp was Ruaridh Erskine of Mar. Erskine was a Celtic nationalist and Gaelic activist who sought to promote the language through his publishing and journalistic activities. He retained a romantic view that the Celtic nations of the United Kingdom, especially Scotland and Ireland, could use their common cultural heritage to break away from the union. He was prominent in Scottish nationalist organisations in the early twentieth century, having broken away from the Scottish Home Rule Association on the grounds of its acceptance of the Union, eventually finding his way to the Scots National League, one of the many small groups which coalesced in the National Part of Scotland, forerunner of the

⁴⁶ Bruce Lenman, *The Jacobite Risings in Britain, 1689 – 1746* (London, 1980); Daniel Szechi, *1715: The Great Jacobite Rebellion* (New Haven, 2006); Alasdair Raffe, *The Culture of Controversy: Religious Arguments in Scotland, 1660 – 1714* (Woodbridge, 2012); Christopher A. Whatley, ‘reformed religion, regime change and the struggle for the “soul of Scotland”, c. 1688–c. 1788’, *Scottish Historical Review*, 92 (2013), 66–99.

⁴⁷ *Scotsman*, 3 Apr. 1907, 8.

SNP, in 1928.⁴⁸ He was scathing of the idea of trying to draw attention to Scottish national identity by 'toasting the memory of the men and the measure principally responsible for its extinction' and he held the plans of the Convention of Royal Burghs in contempt and thought that their plans were fit only for the pages of Alice in Wonderland. He proposed a counter demonstration of 'all – and their name is legion today in Scotland – who are disgusted with the Union and have a contempt for political swaddling clothes' but he was no more successful than the Convention in organising a 'popular serenade' in favour of his position.⁴⁹ A slightly different position was taken by the veteran home ruler Charles Waddie, his starting point was similar to Erskine's in that he questioned the idea of celebrating the anniversary of the Union: 'it was consummated against the wish of the vast majority of the Scottish People. It has been a curse to Scotland and to this day enables the English to plunder us of millions.' Waddie argued that the idea of a federal union had been popular in 1707 and, in his many writings in promotion of the Scottish Home Rule Association, argued for variants of this idea as a form of recasting of the United Kingdom.⁵⁰

More widespread than the effusions of such as Erskine and Napier was a sense that the early twentieth century was a period in which the Union was not working very effectively for Scotland. This was a persistent theme in Scottish Liberalism from the middle of the nineteenth century. It had fuelled the work of the Scottish Rights

⁴⁸ Derick S. Thomson, 'Erskine, Stuart Richard (1869–1960)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40311>]; H.J. Hanham, *Scottish Nationalism* (London, 1969), 136; Chris Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism: Scotland, Society and Politics, 1707–1994* (London, 1994), 23.

⁴⁹ Letter from 'R. Erskine', *Glasgow Herald*, 4 Feb. 1907, 11.

⁵⁰ Letter from Charles Waddie, *Scotsman*, 16 Mar. 1907, 11; for an expanded version of a similar argument see, Charles Waddie, *The Treaty of Union between Scotland and England. With an Historical Introduction* (Edinburgh, 1883); Charles Waddie, *How Scotland Lost her Parliament and What Came Of It*, third edition (Edinburgh, 1902) and for context see Kane, 'A study of the debate on Scottish home rule, 1886 to 1914'; 'The late Mr Charles Waddie, *Scotsman*, 6 Feb. 1912, 5.

Association in the 1850s and the campaign – in which the Convention of Royal Burghs was prominent – for the appointment of a Scottish Secretary in 1885. It would also be at the forefront of the work of the Young Scots Society, a group of Scottish Liberals who sought to reset the message of the party in the aftermath of the general election of 1900 in which the Unionists had done unusually well in Scottish constituencies. As the Liberals recovered their unity and the Unionists began to divide over fiscal policy Scottish politics seemed to return to normal, the Liberals did well in by-elections from 1903 and performed very strongly in the 1906 general election, sweeping up fifty-eight of the seventy Scottish seats. This created very significant expectations that the government would deliver on a range of Scottish grievances, not least land reform, which was seen as overdue. By 1907, however, the commentary on the bicentenary of the Union was coloured by a feeling that the government had not delivered on such expectations. A Dundee newspaper felt that

The bicentenary of the Union is occurring at a time when the disadvantages accruing to Scotland from it are decidedly more conspicuous than the advantages ... the Scottish people, therefore, can hardly be expected to be in a mood for rejoicing over an event which at the moment seems to have had no other effect than to deprive them of their legitimate rights.⁵¹

A few days later the same newspaper went a little further and argued that while the Union had undoubtedly been a blessing to England its current effect on Scotland was more questionable. The way in which the Union was functioning gave credence to the need for a form of home rule – ‘some opportunity of disposing of purely

⁵¹ *Dundee Courier*, 31 Jan. 1907, 4.

Scottish affairs in Edinburgh' – and that the current condition of politics meant that such an innovation was possible.

This was a doubtful proposition. Indeed, there was more frustration than confidence in Scottish Liberal politics in this period. As early in its life as 1907 the government was perceived as having failed to deliver on its promises to Scotland. The Liberals had campaigned strongly on land reform, a subject which, in their view, had lain dormant since their reforms of the 1880s. Anti-landlord rhetoric had been prominent in the election campaign but the Liberals faced problems in bringing their ideas to the statute book. Although their proposals were popular among the crofters of the highlands, there was much opposition to land reform among the more prosperous farmers of lowland Scotland and landlord opposition in the House of Lords meant that it would be 1911 before this promise was made good and even then the Act was an imperfect vehicle for rural transformation.⁵² There was little sign of any legislation on Scottish home rule, reform of local taxation, action on the temperance question, the development of education or reforms to the position of the Church of Scotland and similar grievances as had been voiced in the 1850s and the 1880s began to be heard – that Scotland was being neglected and underfunded and that the union was an imperfect structure. The difficulty for the Liberals in Scotland was that although many Liberal seats were held by carpet-baggers who sought political security north of the border – Asquith, Birrell and Churchill, for example – there were also a range of progressive MPs who had been strong in their rhetoric in the election campaign and now had positions in the government – the Scottish Secretary, John Sinclair; the Lord Advocate Thomas Shaw; and the Solicitor General, Alexander Ure. The Prime

⁵² Ewen A. Cameron, *Land for the People? The British Government and the Scottish Highlands, c. 1880 to 1925* (East Linton, 1996), 124–43.

Minister, Henry Campbell Bannerman, was also a Scot and MP for a Scottish constituency.⁵³ The principal vehicle for Scottish discontent with the Union in this period was not the Scottish Home Rule Association, which had somewhat run out of steam, but the Young Scots Society. The propaganda of the Young Scots argued that a form of federal home rule – or ‘Home Rule All Round’ – would relieve parliamentary congestion and ensure that the necessary legislation on the key Scottish issues could be passed. For these Liberals and their supporters in the press, such as Hector MacPherson of the *Edinburgh Evening News*, the structure of the union required reform for Scotland’s place within it to be secured.⁵⁴ Despite the sense of neglect in the 1906–10 period, the Liberals held their position in Scotland in the general elections of 1910, in contrast to other areas of the country and home rule came back onto the agenda in the 1910–14 period. Although noises were made by the government that Irish Home Rule, their primary preoccupation, would be accompanied by a measure for Scotland, no real progress towards this objective had been made by the time of the outbreak of the Great War, much to the frustration of the leading lights of the party in Scotland.⁵⁵ Thus, although the anniversary of the Union of 1707 did not generate a significant number of events to mark the occasion some of the commentary and debate generated by the bicentenary can help us to understand some of the key themes in Scottish politics in the period from the election of 1906 to the outbreak of the Great War. This reveals that although there was an

⁵³ *Perthshire Constitutional and Journal*, 14 Jan. 1907, 2; 30 Jan. 1907, 2.

⁵⁴ Young Scots Society, *Sixty Points for Home Rule* (Edinburgh, 1912); J. A. Murray MacDonald, *The Case for Federal Home Rule* (Edinburgh, 1904); S.J. Brown, “‘Echoes of Midlothian’: Scottish Liberalism and the South African War, 1899–1902”, *Scottish Historical Review*, 71 (1992), 156–83; James Kennedy, *Liberal Nationalisms: Empire, State and Civil Society in Scotland and Quebec* (Montreal and Kingston, 2013).

⁵⁵ See the hints in Asquith’s speech introducing the third Irish Home Rule Bill, Hansard (Commons), 5th series, 36, 1399–426 (11 April 1912); Oxford, Bodleian Library, Asquith Mss, 89, ff. 1–12, Deputation from Scottish Liberal MPs, 6 May 1912; John Kendle, *Ireland and the Federal Solution: The Debate over the United Kingdom Constitution, 1870–1920* (Montreal and Kingston, 1989), 128–50.

apparent consensus on the enduring nature of the Union and an absence of formal nationalist politics there was, nevertheless, a debate on the nature of the Union and the way that it affected Scotland. Unionist politics were not monochrome.

Conclusion

When Scottish historians have thought of the bicentenary of the Union of 1707 there has been a tendency to damn the events with faint praise and to suggest that the anniversary was not widely marked. While this paper does not suggest that there is a particularly rich vein of untapped material it has sought to draw attention to a range of publications, public events and public debate about 1707 in 1907. The evidence presented here suggests that Roland Quinault was right to suggest that the development of academic history and the projection of its work to a wider public was an important characteristic of this anniversary. The ideas put forward by scholars were reflected in the commentary in the rich newspaper press of early twentieth-century Scotland. The public reflections on the Union in 1907 and the wider development of engagement with the Scottish past in this period provides little support for the idea that there was a cringe from serious discussion of history in the Edwardian period. The anniversary, perhaps most importantly, tells us something about the way that the Union was regarded in 1907. There was a reasonably broad consensus that even if the Union had not been popular in 1707 that some form of arrangement between Scotland and England was necessary in the context of the early eighteenth century. There was also agreement that there was a causal link between Scotland's economic, political and cultural development and the conditions created by the Union. In 1907, however, there was a noticeable point of view that

Scotland was being taken for granted by the political class. There were few who argued that this endangered the Union but many more who suggested that its terms could be modified to give a more prominent place to Scottish issues. This is evidence of the centrality of the Union to Scottish life at the moment of the anniversary. The answer to the criticisms raised by the Young Scots and others was not to dissolve the Union or even to seek particularly fundamental reforms of its terms but to introduce changes, often short of the creation of a home-rule parliament for Scotland, to smooth its workings as far as Scotland was concerned. There was agreement that the United Kingdom had accommodated Scotland within its structures rather than, even implicitly, working to create a unitary state which did not recognise Scottish national feeling.